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Mixed Use: Celebrated Concept, Partially Promoted Practice: English Experience with Implementing a Planning Principle

Abstract

Influenced by such normative approaches to design and development as New Urbanism, various planning regimes increasingly celebrate mixed use as sustainable and desirable. However, this rarely translates into the practice being promoted as the 'norm'. The literature identifies this situation in past versions of English planning policy but a lack of recent detailed studies limits our understanding of the current approach and thus whether the situation persists. Addressing this information gap, the paper explores policy's present approach through a qualitative content analysis of written policy and interviews with local government planning officers. Findings indicate that mixed use is a celebrated, though ambiguous and changeable concept, with planners identifying such conceptual fluidity as desirable and necessary. Policy is revealed to attach numerous beneficial outcomes to mixed use, including reducing the need to travel and supporting more sustainable modes of transport. However, it continues to be encouraged in only a few locations, primarily town and city centres, whilst it is constrained in many others. This leads the paper to conclude that, within policy, mixed use is as a cherished and celebrated concept, but a partially promoted practice.

Introduction

Influenced by urban theorist and activist Jane Jacobs (1961), contemporary planners in Germany (Hirt, 2007), the UK (Rowley, 1998; 1996) Canada (Grant, 2002) and elsewhere have come to celebrate 'mixed use', referred to here as MU, as sustainable and desirable. Normative approaches to urban form which shape planning practice in these territories, such as New Urbanism, are laced with support for the concept. However, this does not automatically translate into a planning regime that promotes MU as the 'norm'. Often, it is directed and confined to a handful of locations, typically town and city centres and brownfield sites, whilst support persists for the segregation of uses (Grant, 2002; Hirt, 2007; Rowley, 1998). Given the plaudits it receives, one might expect MU to be encouraged more widely.

However, MU has been associated with certain disadvantages (Coupland, 1997a). For example, Agnotti and Hanhardt (2001: 147) note the possibility of health and quality of life problems if housing is mixed with certain types of industry whilst Rawlinson (2005) discusses the potential for practical, economic and management challenges when diverse uses with differing needs are combined. Studies also question the benefits New Urbanism and similar doctrines attribute to mix with Rowley (1996: 85) warning that "nostalgia and propaganda", rather than "research and analysis", underpins many of these claims. Research has, for instance, challenged the presumed relationship between urban form and travel behaviour which anchors many of policy's arguments for MU (see Stead, 2001; Jarvis, 2003; Williams, 1999; Cao, 2010; Gordon and Richardson, 1997). Given these issues, whilst planning could promote MU more widely, it seems less certain whether it should.

Turning to English planning policy, an absence of recent detailed studies on the approach to MU precludes conclusions on the concept's current status. Most studies were completed in the 1990s and early 2000s with attention focussing on a single layer of policy, typically national policy or that produced by local planning authorities (i.e. local municipal government). Also, attention usually rests on the approach found in written policy with little or no consideration of the way this is interpreted by social actors (e.g. planners). Against this background, research exploring policy's current approach to MU was completed. Research investigated the approach found in written policy produced by national, regional and local government and the way social actors interpret and apply this guidance. Whether policy continues to celebrate MU and, if so, whether it has come to promote MU as the 'norm', were key interests. There was also a desire to see if studies questioning the assumed benefits of MU had had any influence on policy, perhaps prompting reduced support for the concept.

MU in English planning policy

A striking feature of planning policy's approach to MU is the term's ambiguity (Coupland, 1997a; Rowley 1996). Issues such as the number of uses and the integration between uses necessary for MU to be identified are left open to interpretation (Coupland, 1997a; Rowley 1996). Only a minority of local planning authorities attempt any kind of definition (Barlow et al., 2002). However, even when definitions do exist, an "inherent flexibility" can define MU policies (Coupland, 1997b: 208-209). A similar uncertainty pervades the concept in North America where Agnotti and Hanhardt (2001: 146) refer to the "conceptual ambiguity of mixed use". Given this, when policy and planners allocate sites for and attribute benefits to MU there is uncertainty around the type of development being discussed. There is also uncertainty around whether MU is a distinct practice separate from the general act of mixing uses. Contrary to policy, the literature provides a range of definitions with Rowley's (1996, 1998) multi-dimensional model being perhaps the most sophisticated (and inclusive). Here, the concept of MU embraces a number of dimensions including spatial scale, location, tenure, occupation / use, time (in terms of when a property is occupied) and 'grain' referring to the manner in which the various components of an area (buildings, uses, activities, people and spaces) mix together. The different ways these dimensions are expressed and relate to one another creates different 'types' of MU and defines the 'quality' of MU identified (Rowley, 1998). MU is not then a single fixed state rather it is a continuum with different gradations and types of mix being possible (Rowley, 1998).

MU started to achieve "increasing official recognition" in planning policy in the 1990s (Rowley 1998: 1). In this period, a report by The Urban Task Force (1999) (a group of property experts convened by the Government), titled 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' proved particularly influential in confirming its merits to policy makers (Carmona et al., 2003; Urban Task Force, 2005). In terms of its historical origins, Hoppenbrouwer and Louw (2005) suggest European planning came to embrace MU as a response to, and rejection of, the 'Functional City' ideal of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s which influenced the post-war rebuilding of many European cities. That ideal, inspired by Modernist and Functionalist principles, and underpinned by concerns about locating residents near industry, aimed to separate uses and create an 'ordered' pattern of development (Hoppenbrouwer and Louw, 2005; Grant, 2002; Agnotti and Hanhardt, 2001). For Louw and Bruinsma (2006: 1), the rejection of this ideal has created a "paradigm shift in town planning" where "promoting the segregation of land uses" has given way to "promoting their integration". However, in his analysis of English planning

policy, Rowley (1998) found segregating land uses and safeguarding sites for individual uses continued to find support whilst, along with Coupland (1997b), he found local planning authorities differed markedly in their support for MU. For English planning policy then, the paradigm shift identified by Louw and Bruinsma (2006) seemed to be absent.

Policy supports MU on the grounds that it delivers a number of beneficial outcomes. For example, it claims MU reduces the need to travel, supports more sustainable modes of transport and enhances an area's vitality and vibrancy (Coupland, 1997a; Hoppenbrouwer and Louw, 2005; Barlow et al., 2002). It also takes a positive view of the broader concept of land use mix with various benefits attached to practices like providing housing in town and city centres and retail units in residential areas (Rowley, 1998). For example, town and city centre housing is seen to expand and diversify the housing stock, increase the tax base and enhance the security and attractiveness of urban centres (Couch 1997). However, as noted earlier, studies and scholars have queried the evidence base for many of these claims (see Grant, 2002; Rowley, 1998).

Exploring policy's approach to MU

There are many ways to define planning policy with Bracken (1981: 230 - 231) arguing there is "no simple definition about what policy is". Williams' (1999) refers to a distinction, said to be long established within planning theory, between policy as 'content', meaning statements of intent in the guise of text and diagrams, and policy as 'process', meaning the processes of implementation associated with interpreting and applying these statements. Influenced by this view, the paper understands planning policy as comprising both components. Ultimately, planning policy is defined as statutory and non-statutory statements of intent produced by formal planning bodies on land use regulation, development management and spatial planning, and the processes of implementation associated with these statements (Haughton et al., 2010; Williams, 1999).

To explore policy's approach to MU, a qualitative content analysis was completed on a sample of written policy whilst semi-structured interviews were carried out with local government planning officers.

Qualitative content analysis of written policy

Qualitative content analysis simplifies and reduces large volumes of data into "organized segments" (Marvasti, 2004 in Silverman, 2006: 163) whilst it describes and analyses text to represent its content or meaning (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Consequently, it enabled key messages to be extracted from hundreds of pages of written policy. An inductive approach was adopted in the analysis of policy with themes relevant to an explanation of the approach to MU, and the general act of mixing uses, identified through repeated reading of the policy text.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select examples of national, regional and local policy active in January 2010. At the national level, Government produces policy statements on a variety of subjects. Statements on any subject found, in an exploratory study, to have guidance relevant to the approach to MU, and the general act of land use mix, were abstracted for analysis. This included statements on sustainable development, housing, economic growth, noise, open space

and transport (amongst others). At the regional level, eight Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), one for each English region (London has a separate London Plan), provide a broad development strategy for a 15 to 20 year period (Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2004). The RSS for the South East, The South East Plan (Government Office of the South East (GOSE), 2009), was selected for analysis. Mace et al. (2007: 52) suggest that higher density, compact MU development only “makes sense” in the “hot housing markets of the south-east”. A focus on the South East Plan created an opportunity to ‘test’ whether policy-makers hold with Mace et al.’s (2007) assessment as indicated by the content of the regional strategy. At the local level, policies for three local planning authorities in the South East were selected for study. With planning legislation requiring local policy to reference regional and national policy, there was an interest in exploring consistencies in the orientation to mix between the three tiers of policy (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006). Further, exploring consistencies in orientation between dissimilar localities (bound by a common regional policy) proved appealing and so settlements exhibiting diverse development scenarios were selected. For each community, the Core Strategy, a high level spatial strategy, and the Local Plan, a detailed land use management and development plan, formed the main sources of statutory policy. Both documents were selected for study. The three communities were:

1. Ashford in Kent – chosen to represent a ‘high growth’ scenario. 31,000 homes and large amounts of commercial space, in at least two urban extensions, are planned over the next 20 years (Ashford’s Future, 2010).

2. Southampton in Hampshire – chosen to represent a ‘growth through brownfield redevelopment’ scenario. Being a densely developed city, with a built up area that extends to the administrative boundary in many places, Southampton will see most new development occur at previously developed sites (Southampton City Council (SSC), 2010).

3. Epsom and Ewell in Surrey (referred to here as Epsom) – chosen to represent a ‘growth constrained by the Green Belt’ scenario. 42% of Epsom is designated Green Belt land (Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (E&EBC, 2000) where most forms of development are prohibited in order to keep it permanently open (ODPM, 2001). Consequently, Green Belt policy tightly restricts the location and amount of development possible within Epsom.

Planning officer interviews

How a planning officer interprets planning policy at the development management stage, when planning applications are decided, is crucial in determining how this policy comes to influence the built environment. These officers determine the vast majority of planning applications and, when doing so, refer to and interpret written policy. Given this, it seemed only right to explore planning officers’ interpretations of written policy’s approach to MU. Semi-structured interviews were completed (in 2010) with a local government Planning Policy Officer (referred to as a PO) and a Development Management Officer (referred to as a DMO) at Ashford, Southampton and Epsom. POs construct planning policy and provide advice on the policy implications of development proposals to, amongst others, DMOs. DMOs determine planning applications. The account of policy’s approach identified in the qualitative content analysis steered the interviews with discussion exploring how far it reflected the officers’ interpretations. However, since interviews are an artificial process, where data reflects the

presence and interaction of the interviewer and interviewee, the interpretations officers' gave might not have been a true reflection of the interpretations they employ on a daily basis. Interviews were chosen, though, because they supported a dialogue between the researcher and the planning officer enabling points of interest to be expanded, unexpected comments followed up, and points of confusion or ambiguity resolved in situ (Britten, 2006). The next sections discuss the findings drawn from these interviews and the qualitative content analysis of written policy.

Celebrated though vague concept

MU, and the general act of mixing uses, continues to be praised and celebrated within national, regional and local policy with numerous benefits attributed to each. For the planning officers, it was considered a self-evident, unquestionable 'good' to mix land uses. For Ashford's PO it was "good planning, obviously", whilst for Epsom's DMO it was "just engrained within an officer" to seek mix at town centre sites. However, a definitive explanation of MU was absent in both written policy and amongst officers. It could refer to mix between residential and non-residential uses, with Epsom's PO claiming this was a necessary condition, however, the qualitative content analysis of written policy revealed it could also mean mix between non-residential uses. Southampton's Local Plan, for instance, allocated a large site for "employment-led" MU with "offices, business, general industrial, storage and distribution" prescribed (SCC, 2010: 121). Ashford's DMO queried, though, whether this constituted MU because all uses were 'employment' suggesting, perhaps, a discrepancy between officers' and written policy's understandings of the concept. Officers similarly discounted mix between different 'types' of dwellings arguing that all would in effect be the same use – residential. Whilst officers reported no 'working definition' of the concept, comments such as these suggest that at least informally there was a belief that MU involved mix between distinct uses. However, Ashford's PO appeared to add a further qualification. A scheme providing open space alongside housing was discounted because the open space was "ancillary" to the housing (Ashford PO). For this officer then, uses had to be distinct and independent. Amongst the officers, another notable point of consensus was that MU involved at least two types of land use.

Flexible concept

Planning officers identified MU as a fluid concept with its meaning reformulated on a site by site, planning application by planning application basis. Like Rowley (1998) then, MU did not have a single fixed state. Officers felt this flexible approach was appropriate because applications and sites had to be judged on their merits and a fixed, prescriptive definition would be unsuited to this task. Indeed, as a general point, officers favoured and were required to construct flexible policies and they interpreted and applied these policies in a flexible way. There was then an innate flexibility to policy's preferences or, alternatively, an innate preference for flexibility within policy:

"...I mean more generally I would have thought that whilst obviously its very important to have plans and to be able to set out and to give certainty to developers about what they can and can't do at the same point you, you're always going to need a degree of flexibility" (Ashford PO)

When constructing policy on MU for individual sites, a site's potential and the needs and components of the surrounding area determined how the concept was understood. Consequently, within a single plan, MU could mean different things at different sites. When determining a planning application for a MU site, officers considered the nature of the application, the content of written policy, a site's potential and the context of the surrounding area. Whilst this meant written policy was a guide rather than a set of prescriptive instructions, Southampton's PO reported that it was not so malleable as to permit any type of development desired by an applicant. If the applicant's proposal differed substantively from policy's expectations then there would be "every chance" planning permission would be refused (Southampton PO). Ashford's PO and DMO referred, for instance, to an application which had been refused for a MU site because it failed to satisfy written policy's requirements on integration between uses. Whilst the application proposed a range of uses, officers felt these were too poorly connected to qualify as MU.

MU as a 'descriptive / evaluative concept'

As the discussion to date has established, within policy MU is a fluid, ambiguous concept. However, amongst planning officers, it seems to contain some rather less movable components. These officers agreed, for instance, that MU involved at least two uses and the uses had to be distinct (see earlier). Amongst these officers then, the beginnings of a partial definition seemed evident. This, combined with the esteem in which it was plainly held by officers and written policy, suggests MU can be viewed as a 'descriptive / evaluative concept'. For Plant et al. (1980: 206), this is a concept which is both "empirically descriptive" and "normatively toned". It describes but also presents the object of that description in a positive light (Plant et al. 1980). The planning officer interviews confirmed an idea emerging in written policy that MU is a concept which both describes a variable 'type' of development and presents this development in a positive light (Plant et al., 1980: 206). Officers spoke about "proper MU" (Epsom DMO), "a decent mix" and being "disappointed" with certain mixes (Southampton PO). They sought the "right mix of uses" and mentioned the possibility of an "ideal" mix (Epsom PO). Comments such as these suggest MU is about more than the simple inclusion and arrangement of uses. They suggest MU stands apart from the general act of mixing uses. Indeed, as indicated by the following exchange on the provision of open space with housing, for Ashford's PO, a distinction was clearly drawn between the 'technical' act of mixing uses and the 'special', normative concept, of MU:

Ashford PO:...I know it is a mix of uses because it's not just residential its got other land uses mixed in which is what you've picked up but it is a, a slightly different definition really

Researcher: So within planning things like open space to support residential, is that not really considered another use it's just considered

Ashford PO: Well yeah, I would say, I wouldn't say that was MU but technically it is a mix of uses

Making the case for mix

The benefits attached to MU, in written policy and by planning officers, typically resemble the benefits identified in the policy of the 1990s and early 2000s (mentioned earlier). Frequently cited

benefits include reducing the need to travel and supporting more sustainable modes of transport with national policy explicitly associating these with efforts to tackle climate change. Studies which question the association between urban form and travel behaviour would not then appear to have affected policy's belief in this relationship. 'Sustainability' was another often cited benefit, especially amongst the planning officers. They understood 'sustainability' in broad terms seeing it as a concept which encompassed issues such as reducing travel, economic viability and socially mixed communities. For officers, sustainability and land use mix were intertwined. A sustainable community required a mix of uses whilst a mix of uses was unquestionably a way to enhance a community's sustainability:

"...I mean if there's one area where you could say MU, mixing uses is key this is in the urban extensions...you know these are meant to be sustainable urban communities so self-contained almost so I guess the whole range of facilities will be part of what we're planning for" (Ashford PO)

The creation and maintenance of vibrant, active places was frequently associated with the presence of land use mix in retail centres. For officers, co-locating different uses was a necessary precursor to increased levels of activity and vibrancy. These factors were valued for themselves but they were also associated with successful local economies. Additionally, active, vibrant places were thought more secure as natural surveillance would occur. This was the only benefit mentioned by officers that was not explicitly discussed within written policy. Southampton's Local Plan mentioned how converting empty space above retail units to residential use would bring "additional life and security to an area" but it did not directly mention natural surveillance (SCC, 2010: 77).

Though often noted, 'vitality' and 'vibrancy' were poorly defined terms in both written policy and amongst planning officers. Indeed, Epsom's PO felt that it was "hard to define what viability and vitality actually is though [national policy] used to bang on about it the whole time". Discussions with officers teased out general thoughts on meaning, with economic and social aspects thought probable, but understandings were still vague:

"...well it's a standard phrase in [national planning policy] which is about you know the livelihood of town centres and the way they operate economically I think, so it's mixing those two, so making them places which are interesting to be in but also making them economically viable as well" (Ashford PO)

Linked to this issue of vague terminology, when MU was discussed, at times a type of 'comprehension gap' seemed to occur between officers and written policy. Officers sometimes seemed unfamiliar with or uncertain about particular terms and claims. For example, Southampton's Local Plan claimed that mixing uses could help "make adequate provision for the conduct of business in the 21st Century" but gave no explanation as to how this might occur (SCC, 2010: 6). Southampton's DMO seemed uncertain as to how mix could fulfil this function and could only speculate on the issue:

"I was just thinking that through really (pause) I guess in terms of, what that means I mean, I guess that's starting to talk about you know modern, modern business approaches so things

like live-work units are more of a, sort of a, sort of something we're being asked to consider these days, so to allow people to live closer to where they work so I guess that's what that means, I could be interpreting that in the wrong way but I think it's the sustainability agenda, getting people living closer to where they work..." (Southampton DMO)

Other examples of officers' unfamiliarity with terms and claims included a general fuzziness around the meaning of 'neighbourhood services', 'services and facilities' and 'local services'. There was also an interesting reluctance amongst officers to speculate on the content of these phrases.

Partially promoted practice

Though lauding the concept, policy fails to promote MU as the 'norm' in all environments and locations. In effect, it is a partially promoted practice. Similar to the policy of the 1990s and the early 2000s, it is actively encouraged in a few locations but it is constrained in many others. After decades of praise, MU, and the general act of mixing uses, remains the exception rather than the rule. MU is most actively encouraged at retail centres (city, town, district, local and village centres) and at previously developed, strategic and surplus public sector sites. Here, MU buildings are encouraged along with processes which achieve mix such as providing flats above commercial premises and creating and retaining a diversity of uses. In supporting MU buildings, policy seems comfortable with the concept occurring at quite small spatial scales where uses are pressed close together. All tiers of policy identified retail centres as the "best" (Ashford DMO) or "ideal" (Epsom DMO) locations for mix claiming this was because they featured public transport connections, higher densities and a concentration of uses and activity.

A degree of, typically rough grained, mix is supported by policy at individual dwellings, housing sites, and new and existing residential areas/communities. However, there is no mention of the term MU in relation to these locations and properties. At individual dwellings, where the impact on residential amenity is low, all tiers of policy facilitate a degree of mix by supporting such things as home working, live work units and home based businesses. At larger housing sites, national and local policy requires or recommends the inclusion of open space with, at the local level, Ashford, Epsom and Southampton setting thresholds, linked to the number of proposed dwellings, at which open space will be sought. However, at these sites planners reported that written policy's clear aspirations for open space provision were interpreted and applied flexibly, and with discretion. For example, Southampton's PO claimed open space might not be sought at city centre schemes because the location may make this impractical.

At new residential communities and urban extensions, national, regional and local policy promotes the need for "genuine mixed use communities" (Communities and Local Government (CLG), 2009: 8) and "flexibly designed, mixed-use places of real character" (Ashford Borough Council (ABC), 2008: 30). Policy seems capable then of identifying MU at large spatial scales. However, at these scales, for MU to be identified all that is required is relatively loose integration between certain types of use. For example, national policy discusses 'MU communities' but only requires housing to be a ten minute walk from "neighbourhood services" and public transport facilities and within 800 meters of a primary school (CLG, 2009: 8–9). In Ashford, the proposed urban extensions will be 'MU places' but will feature a "polycentric design" where large areas of housing are arranged around a

High Street (Ashford DMO). Only when it forms a pragmatic response to perceived site conditions is fine grained mix supported at these types of area. To illustrate, in Epsom, at several former hospital sites identified for new residential communities, policy supports converting former hospital buildings to community and small scale commercial use and developing the surrounding area for housing. The result would be a close intermingling of residential and non-residential uses. However, such conversions were only supported, and thus fine grained mix facilitated, on occasions when the buildings could not be converted to residential use.

Turning to existing residential areas, these are rarely identified for mix although Southampton's Core Strategy encourages "individual shops and local services such as doctors, schools and community centres" in the city's suburban neighbourhoods (SCC, 2010b: 19). Additionally, the South East Plan supports the provision of business space in "less traditional locations such as the suburbs" (GOSE, 2009: 50). More commonly though, a collection of policies preserve and reserve existing residential areas for continued residential use. Such policies protect existing dwellings from change of use, require housing to be separated from polluting, potentially polluting, noisy and traffic generating uses, and direct main town centre uses (including retail, leisure, office, leisure, entertainment and tourism) to retail centres. Policy claims these measures help protect residential amenity as they limit the potential for residents to be exposed to negative externalities, such as noise and traffic, which can result from business and non-residential uses. Plus, by directing businesses away from residential areas, the probability of these occupiers encountering residential neighbours is reduced, and so the potential for these businesses to be made subject to onerous restrictions on their working practices, intended to protect residential amenity, is also reduced.

The fewest opportunities for mix are found at properties, sites and areas protected for a specific use or a narrow range of uses. National, regional and local policy protects sites and premises for activities like waste management, mineral extraction, health and education whilst local and regional policy safeguards sites for employment use, typically industry and warehousing. In such cases, opportunities to include other uses and thus bring diversity and mix are limited. Policy claims these measures support business and communities by providing and maintaining an affordable supply of commercial land and premises. Plus, they are seen to ensure an adequate supply of sites and premises for uses essential to a settlement's sustainability (e.g. waste management). Without such safeguarding policies, it is claimed sites and properties would be redeveloped (and so lost) for higher value uses such as residential.

Local focus

An analysis of policy for Southampton, Ashford and Epsom reveals, in terms of content, a broadly similar approach to MU, and the general act of mixing uses, with mix encouraged and resisted in the same types of area. However, local conditions cause differences in the precise execution of this approach. For example, all communities featured policies which allowed mix at dwellings but for Ashford and Epsom some policies related to isolated, rural dwellings. The fact that both communities are partly rural helps explain the presence of these policies. Very different development scenarios, high growth (Ashford), growth through brownfield development (Southampton) and growth constrained by the Green Belt (Epsom), would not then seem to be associated with very different approaches to mix. But, with only one example of each scenario considered, broad generalisations

such as this are not possible. The influence of national policy, which provides the overall framework against and within which local policy is constructed, seems to account for the general consistency in approach. Interestingly, though similar in broad content, the emphasis each community placed on the specific concept of MU differed. Focussing on their Core Strategies, Epsom's contained only one policy that explicitly mentioned MU and this only noted that MU schemes would be 'encouraged' in accessible retail centres. In contrast, Ashford's Core Strategy identifies an overarching 'vision' for the town centre, urban areas and proposed urban extensions which entails a focus on MU development. Overall, it seemed communities featuring scenarios of 'high growth' and 'growth through brownfield development' placed greater emphasis on MU in their development plans than did a community featuring a scenario of 'growth constrained by the Green Belt'. Unfortunately, the interviewed planning officers were unable to comment on the role, if any, played by these scenarios in the emphasis each settlement placed on MU.

Conclusions

Current planning policy, like past policy, continues to celebrate the concept of MU, and the general act of mixing uses. Various benefits are attributed to each with many carried forward from the policy of the 1990s and early 2000s. Studies which question the benefits of mix would not then seem to have had any discernible impact on policy's approach or the arguments which underpin it. Though praised, policy lacks a precise definition of MU. However, amongst planning officers there is some consensus that, as a minimum, MU involves at least two distinct, independent uses. The beginnings of a partial definition can then be identified. This emerging definition, combined with the esteem in which it is held by planners and policy, makes it possible to view MU as a normative/evaluative concept. It describes a variable 'type' of development and presents this development in a positive light. This praise has not, however, resulted in an approach which promotes MU or the general act of mixing uses as the 'norm'. These practices are encouraged in only a few locations whilst they are complicated in many others. Retail centres, brownfield, strategic and surplus public sector sites are the preferred locations for MU. There are some opportunities for mix in new and existing residential areas whilst its potential is severely constrained at properties, sites and areas safeguarded for a single or narrow range of uses. Overall, this context leads the paper to identify MU as a celebrated and cherished concept but a partially promoted practice.

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